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LETTER; Finding Health Care Waste

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To the Editor:

In "Health Care's Infectious Losses" (Op-Ed, July 6), Paul O'Neill significantly overstates the financial loss to the health care system that hospital infections and medical errors are responsible for.

While their occurrence does waste money, and more important causes needless death and injury, it is not remotely possible that they could account for \$1 trillion in health care spending out of a total of \$2.2 trillion a year.

The major areas of waste regarding health care costs are administrative expenditures and unnecessary care. The latter alone squanders as much as 30 percent a year (\$700 billion or more) of America's health care dollar, according to a report from the Congressional Budget Office in June 2008.

While hospital infections and medical errors must be reduced, even more saving would come from attacking administrative costs and unnecessary care.

Robert A. Levine
Westport, Conn., July 7, 2009

The writer is a former chief of neurology at Norwalk Hospital and author of a coming book, "Shock Therapy for the American Health Care System."

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